***WHAT FOLLOWS ARE PARAGRAPHS ABOUT SONNETS 1, 13, 14, 21, 22, 32 AND 43. THEY ARE INTENDED TO PROVIDE MODELS AND IDEAS FOR HOW TO WRITE ABOUT THEM. DO NOT DO CUT AND PASTES OR COPY WITH SLIGHT COSMETIC CHANGES***The sonnets are Browning's real-time responses to her unfolding relationship and reflect her changing understanding of the nature of love as a passionate and spiritual journey.

**SONNET I**The power of love to transform and bring hope is evident in Sonnet I. In the opening quatrain the archaic ‘antique tongue’ and classical allusion to Theocritus expresses how distanced Browning felt herself from 'a gift for mortals' which ‘a gracious hand’ dispenses to ‘old or young.’ Browning feels this ‘gift’ has passed her by during her 'sweet, sad years, the melancholy years'. Enjambment and caesura leading into thesestet – ‘had flung / A shadow across me. ’ emphasizes how the persona expects no more in her life, except Death, represented as a sinister, menacing 'mystic Shape' behind her. However, Browning expresses the transforming effect of love by the startling direct speech and positive alliterative metaphor in the last line: ‘The silver answer' of 'Not Death, but Love'.**SONNET XIII**Sonnet XIII reveals both the power of love to call forth, to make demands, and Browning’s uncertainty in responding to Robert’s wooing. Through second person direct address, the extended metaphor of the burning ‘torch’ shows her unable or unwilling to articulate her feelings ‘of love hid in me out of reach’. This is despite his request indicated in her opening line: ‘And wilt thou have me fashion into speech’. Browning’s reluctance may stem from her father’s resistance to his children marrying and social stigma (based perhaps on her age), suggested by ‘while the winds are rough / Between our faces’. But she dismisses mere ‘finding words’ as ‘proof …of love’; instead, she uses, perhaps ironically, the Victorian stereotype of a demure, passive woman as she ‘commends’ ‘the silence of my womanhood’ and ‘my woman-love’. But the final lines of the sestet show the power of love to make demands and call forth. The metaphor ‘And rend the garment of my life’ shows the strength of ‘The love I bare thee’ to change irrevocably the outer appearances of her life. The persona’s intense yearning for that love to be fulfilled is expressed through ‘a most dauntless, voiceless fortitude’ and her heart’s ‘grief’ which she must endure.**SONNET XIV**In Sonnet XIV the poet indicates her first open acceptance of Robert’s courting – ‘If thou must love me’ but also expresses a vision of a deeper, enduring, genuine love that surpasses superficial words, physical infatuation or pity. Browning ironically refers to courting conventions common in Victorian times by putting the words into the man’s mouth: ‘Do not say / ‘I love her for her smile -- her look …a trick of thought / That falls in well with mine.” She cautions these attributes ‘may be changed … and love …/ May be unwrought so.//*’ .* This caesura at the start of the sestet emphasizes the transient, untrustworthy nature of such love. But Browning’s growing confidence in their relationship is reflected in an intimate and playful tone in direct address - ‘Beloved’, a series of imperatives - ‘Do not say’ and ‘Neither love me’ - and a depersonalized third person about herself: ‘A creature might forget to weep.’   
  
Beyond these cautions, Browning espouses a purity of genuine love for the essential self of the beloved, expressed through the repetition of ‘for love’s sake only’ and ‘love me for love’s sake’. Such an ideal love would not only grow in intensity but last ‘through love’s eternity.’ These physical, psychological and spiritual dimensions of love reflect Plato’s ideal, in which humans naturally search for completeness and divinity in eternity. These ideals permeate Browning’s sonnets, and are indicative of her classical education and values.  
 **SONNET XXI**Sonnet XXI expresses the power of love to bring hope and to be necessary for a sense of fulfilment. The real connection between the two lovers is evident from the opening second person imperative: ‘Say over again, and yet once over again / That thou dost love me.’ These repeated declarations are likened to a ‘cuckoo song’. In nature, this heralds the coming of 'the fresh Spring'. Robert’s repeated professions of love parallel the persona’s own awakening and new hope. This metaphor is implied by the personification of Spring as the feminine ‘her’.   
  
However, as in several of her sonnets, Browning’s personal context is evident in her lingering 'doubt's pain' and 'a doubtful spirit-voice'. Yet love’s power to fulfil and bring joy overrides these fears as the persona openly accepts and embraces her lover’s affection. Her passion is revealed through direct address 'Beloved' and 'Dear' as she implores him to repeat and ‘Cry, ‘Speak once more –thou lovest //’. This enjambment and caesura at the start of the sestet leads to the reassuring rhetorical question of ‘Who can fear / Too many stars …Too many flowers …?”. The sonnet ends with an exhortation to her ‘Dear’ to remember the spiritual dimension to love, expressed in a meditative sibilant alliteration, ‘love me also in silence with thy soul’. Such imagery reflect Platonic ideals of genuine love through body, soul and divine consciousness, indicative of Browning’s classical education and strong Methodist faith.   
**SONNET XXII**Sonnet XXII expresses the powerful connection between two people intimately and genuinely in love with each other. Christian religious imagery reflecting Browning’s Methodist faith permeate this sonnet. But paradoxically, while this imagery indicates earthly death will not separate the lovers, but will continue in heaven, the persona convinces her lover – shown through the emphatic ‘Think!’ - they should embrace and enjoy their life on earth while they can. Unlike other sonnets, Browning uses first person plural to express their unity ‘When out two souls stand up erect and strong’. At the lovers’ imagined deaths, images of angels – their ‘lengthening wings break into fire’ who would give ‘some golden orb of perfect song’ - seem to provide orthodox religious reassurance that their love lasts beyond mortality.  
  
Yet while this faith clearly seems to sustain Browning, in this sonnet she proclaims a desire for earthly fulfillment with her ‘Beloved’. The caesura at the start of the sestet – ‘Into our deep, dear silence. // Let us stay / Rather on earth’ emphasizes the unexpected inversion of ‘mounting higher’ to heaven. Even the angels could be oppressive – ‘would press on us’ while on earth the lovers would be left alone as ‘the unfit / Contrarious moods of men recoil away’. The persona emphasizes the deep, shared communion between their ‘pure spirits’, her desire for ‘A place to stand and love in’, unafraid of the ‘darkness and the death-hour rounding it.’  
  
**Sonnet XXXII**This sonnet reflects Browning’s insecurities but also the power of love to make demands that lift the lovers to an exalted state of unity of souls. Her apprehension and feelings of unworthiness are evident in the opening quatrain. The poet uses a traditional literary contrast between the sun symbolizing new promise and life as it ‘rose on thine oath / To love me’ and the moon associated with inconstancy: ‘to slacken all those bonds.’ Her feelings of inadequacy are shown by an extended simile as herself as an ‘out-of-tune / Worn viol’ that is redeemed by her male lover’s skill. Certainly the male is here the active, powerful agent ‘I seemed not one / For such a man’s love’ who metaphorically plays her with ‘master-hands’.  
  
The sonnet, however, shows the spiritual, soul-bonding power of ideal love. In traditional love sonnets, feelings of unworthiness are a conventional stance for the lover. Use of past tense verbs – ‘I thought’ and ‘I seemed’ – and of a plural reference to the flawed lovers – ‘from instruments defaced’ – suggest this perspective has passed and love has the power to bring joy and spiritual unity. The poem ends with the musical and spiritual analogy that, together, they create ‘perfect strains’ and their ‘great souls, at one stroke, may do and doat’.  
  
**SONNET XLIII**Both texts imply that love, if it is more than merely attraction and desire, must have a spiritual element. Sonnet XLIII reflects the values of Victorian ideology in its religious affirmations and patriarchal attribution of masculine power: ‘as men strive for Right …as they turn from Praise.’ Written shortly before Browning’s marriage, the poem expresses the transforming and life sustaining power of love. This is linked to both Platonic ideals – as her soul reaches ‘For the ends of Being and ideal Grace’ – and orthodox Christian faith – ‘if God choose, / I shall but love thee better after death.’ Moreover, her faith seems deeper, more mature, as she has moved beyond ‘my childhood’s faith …With my lost saints.’  
The tone of the poem is passionate, confident and joyful, shown by the opening rhetorical question ‘How do I love thee?’ and through the anaphora ‘I love thee’. Yet, paradoxically, this intensity and depth of her love is accentuated by the restrictions and set conventions of the Petrarchan sonnet form that Browning adopted. Iambic pentameter and rigid rhyme scheme, - for example: ‘I love thee to the depth and breadth and height / My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight’ - compress and intensify the spiritual dimension of authentic love.